

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #462-3

with

Ernest L. Golden (EG)

May 5, 1993

Honolulu, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Ernest Golden on May 5, 1993, and we're in his office in the airport industrial area in Honolulu, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Ernest. Let's get started again. We were talking last time about taxi dancing during wartime Honolulu. Can you tell me something about it, how it works? What was a taxi dance?

EG: Taxi dance was paid-for dancing. (That is) the best that I can explain it. The Casino Dance Hall was the one that I was trying to (remember).

WN: Oh, okay.

EG: Casino Dance Hall.

WN: That was on Beretania?

EG: That was on Beretania Street. Beretania and Nu`uanu Street. And it was upstairs. I think we entered on Nu`uanu Street. From a booth you bought scripts or tickets—ten cents each. You select the girl you wanted to dance with if you had a preference. The girls would see you with the tickets. And they were like movie tickets, perforated little tickets. Ten cents each. And I think there was a control as far as the amount of time you got for your ticket. A bell would ring. Maybe this bell would ring possibly two or three times—I'm guessing now—during the playing of a record. So I imagine it may have been thirty cents or more per number. And you just pick up a handful of scripts. And you'd dance. And the bell would ring. She'd tear off a ticket or she'd just let 'em run. Or some of the guys used to just go and sit down on the side just to talk with the girl just to have feminine companionship. But that's basically what it was. And you danced. At least you had feminine companionship for a period of time.

WN: So you'd go with like a roll of scripts . . .

EG: Right.

WN: . . . and then you'd go up to someone . . .

EG: Right.

WN: . . . and just say you want to dance . . .

EG: Yeah.

WN: . . . and give them one script?

EG: She would take the script. You could give it to her, but I think most of the guys just started dancing. You were dancing and the bell would ring, you know. It'd go off because there was a booth there. And the controller—I don't know what they call this person in that booth—that person had a bell, like a buzzer sort of thing. And based on that, that meant that (there) was one script. So it depended on her, I guess. You had the scripts in your hand and she'd just tear them off, you know.

WN: So if you wanted to keep dancing with that same woman she'd just tear off another script.

EG: Yeah.

WN: Or you could just break it off there.

EG: Yeah, you could break it off there and then use it to dance with somebody else.

WN: I see.

EG: But that's pretty much how it worked. And there was a curfew, so I suppose it would start, oh maybe six o'clock in the evening and I'm sure you had to be out by ten o'clock, nine to ten o'clock, I suppose.

WN: So there were no problems with blackout, things like that?

EG: Well, the curfew was on. And we were supposed to be, I think, off the streets at ten o'clock. And unless you had somewhere to stay in town, that meant that you had to be back at the dormitory by ten o'clock. So I'm sure that this had some bearing on the time that the place would close. I'm glad that I could remember that name, Casino Dance Hall. As I mentioned before, there was one or two others. I think there was one on `A`ala Street that Blacks could go to. But we couldn't go to all of them. I don't recall the name of the one that was on `A`ala Street. And there may have been one on Maunakea Street. But I don't recall for sure about that one either. But they were the thing in those days.

WN: Yeah. Were there always enough girls there, or was it more . . .

EG: There were usually more men than women. The women seemed to dress for the evening, and they would have, if I recall correctly, formal gowns, formal wear, and so it looked as if you were going to a ballroom dance or something.

WN: And what would you guys wear?

EG: I'm sure that we did dress. In those days, it was the thing. If you came in town for an evening, you dressed. A lot of guys did dress to the max, you might say. Tie, coat, and all that sort of thing. But I don't know if there was a dress code required. But I think it was just the person themselves who, his own pride that dictated the mode of dress. Or how he would dress. But if I'm correct, the girls were all in evening wear—long gowns and that sort thing.

WN: And they were mostly local girls?

EG: As I recall, mostly local girls. And in those days it was kind of difficult for me to distinguish between what the ethnic background may have been. Looking back now, there was a lot of Filipino girls. I don't know, I think there may have been some Puerto Rican girls. I happen to know some of these people. I got to know them personally because friends of mine married some of these girls and so I got to know them on a more personal basis later. But they were primarily local girls.

WN: Do you remember about how much you spent on one night at a taxi-dance hall?

EG: Oh, lord have mercy. I can't recall. I have no idea.

WN: (Laughs) I mean was it a big spending situation?

EG: It could cost you some money. Now remember, those records were about three minutes, I imagine. That was thirty cents because that bell may ring three times during that period of time. So if you were going to be dancing for an hour or two you could spend a little money.

WN: (Laughs) Right.

EG: I don't recall what was spent. I don't know this on a firsthand basis, but you know how rumors are—that some of the guys who had been down under on the front or something came back with a lot of money and was offering these girls—more or less for an evening, just to be with them—\$145 or something like this. I think it was just for a social evening, not for any sort of sexual relationship or anything like that. It may have been in the back of their minds but I think this was a social thing between two people. I mean, there was some money spent. It could cost them. But to me, I think I would much rather have spent the money that way than in a house of prostitution. To me, it

would be much more acceptable.

WN: Well, it seems like you established some lasting friendships based on that. I mean you were telling me about the Ten Bachelors club. Was some of the friendships you made at the taxi-dance halls, was that. . . .

EG: Some of the guys that I've made friends with were some of the guys that married taxi[-*dance girls*]. And some of these marriages only came later because part of the time there was a shack-up arrangement between these guys. The marriage may have come later. But I do know (a man) that I worked with in later years was living with one of the girls who was a taxi dancer. They may have gotten married later. But for a long time they lived together. Quite a few of the guys had marriage this way, especially from the Casino. But a lot of friendships. . . . Yeah, a lot of my friends were from this area. A lot of my friends were what we call night people. When I say "night people," I don't know how to really define this. A lot of them had been working and possibly had been in the service but no longer. These are the guys I'm speaking of now. And we frequented one or two bars that were Downtown. Two Jacks was one. Was a gathering place for most of us. And from here a lot of friends were made. Then little later on, there were established some after-hour places that we used to frequent. And this was because the bars, I think, closed at one time, used to close around midnight, one o'clock. But then after the bars were all closed, then some of the guys had houses and they'd open those up (and) would sell booze and food and everything else until, oh, six, seven o'clock (laughs) in the morning.

WN: Yeah? This even during curfew time?

EG: Did we have after-hour? A lot of this history now, I might be blending some of it together. But I'm sure there may have been one or two houses that you could go to and stay. As long as you don't come out in the streets. If I'm not mistaken, I think there was one in Waik\_k\_. I've forgotten the name of the guy who owned it, though. Somewhere near Waik\_k\_ that used to be open practically all night.

WN: Relations between Black defense workers or Black military with local girls or Whites, local girls getting married. Were there any problems, do you remember? Was there any kind of taboo—unwritten rule?

EG: There may have been some unwritten laws. I'm trying to recall. There (were) unwritten laws. There was a friend of mine. I can't recall his name. Bobby. But I can't recall if Bobby was an officer. And he married a *Haole wahine*. And they used to have problems. It was the Whites—the White guys—were going to make an issue of it. And even when my wife [*Evangelina Silva Golden*] and I were dating—and this comes closer to the fifties—we'd be walking down the streets and there would either be some remarks made and most definitely stares. My wife is Portuguese. There was no question about it. I think a lot of it was due to jealousy. And a lot of it was due to discrimination, prejudice. But most definite there was always something there.

WN: Do you think it was—your wife being Portuguese—was it, could it have been that they thought your wife was *Haole*?

EG: Yes. They'd consider my wife *Haole*. Now whether. . .

WN: But she wasn't *Haole*. If they knew she was local or . . .

EG: This is why I'm saying some jealousy may have been here because any time anyone had a girlfriend or a date or a woman companion, then those who didn't were going to be—how do you say?—they were going to be jealous of you. So a lot of jealousy may have come along. You know, you've got one and I don't. So in this particular case, I think, even if it had been known that she had been local, that animosity would've been there. And then what gave in their eyesight any justification was that being Portuguese she was Caucasian and they could not make the fine distinction whether she was from here or from the Mainland. So that gave them (laughs) justifiable reasons to say, hey look, you're overstepping the bounds here. But it was there. We're talking (forty) years ago, and a lot of the things have escaped my memory. A lot of it.

WN: You're excused for that.

EG: (Laughs) Thanks. I appreciate it.

(Laughter)

WN: One question I wanted to ask you relating to our last interview was, do you remember the MPs—the military MPs—having any jurisdiction over the civilian defense workers or were you defense workers solely under the jurisdiction of the local Honolulu police?

EG: I remember MPs. I remember vice squad.

WN: This is Honolulu vice squad—police?

EG: Yeah. And the MPs because we were on military bases—on military establishments—where I lived until the late forties. We came under the jurisdiction of MPs. I don't recall having any problems with MPs as such because I never did anything for them to bother me for. That was probably the main reason. I don't recall too much as far as Honolulu police were concerned because I wasn't driving, and I didn't have a car in those days so I didn't come into contact that much with the Honolulu Police Department as such. That's about it. The vice squad thing came later. (WN laughs.) It was pretty much after, I suppose, the fifties. And this came about because my wife and I were dating. And this was when I met my wife, in the fifties—about 1950.

WN: You got married in '51, right? [*Ernest Golden and Evangeline Silva were*

*married November, 1950.]*

EG: Yeah. I met my wife in 1950. A very good friend of ours, married couple who lived at CHA-3. My wife's family was from—lived in Kane`ohe, and she stayed with this family—this couple. And we dated under their supervision, so to speak. And I remember one night they had loaned us their car and we had gone out somewhere, maybe to a movie or something and came back. Just parked in the parking lot, back of their apartment. Two or three vice squadron came up on each side of the car and tried to create something. So I remember this incident because it affected me directly. Now I must have known of many, many instances of vice squad and many instances of MPs and what they did. But as I say, a lot of this, because it didn't affect me firsthand, I can't recall any of the specifics. I do recall that the local police had khaki-type uniform. But not too much. I never came too much in contact with law enforcement parties.

WN: (Laughs) Well, I'm not assuming that you did.

EG: No, no . . .

WN: I think I'm asking the question because of, the stereotype that was generated throughout the town of, you know, when the war was in force and military and defense workers came in. Some of the publications you read is that, you know, it really strained the social structure of Honolulu. And I'm just won . . .

EG: I'm accepting it that way. But yet, I think, in order for me to recall, I recall most incidents that have a direct bearing on me, for some reason or another, then I'm able to come back with something. And there must've been many incidents that I should be aware of and I am aware of, but it just doesn't come up.

WN: You were too good a citizen.

EG: I'm not that good a citizen (WN laughs) because, you know. . . . No, I'm not. I'm not that good. I dare say that I possibly should have been put in jail some time or another but I (have) never been.

WN: (Laughs) We were touching little about the relationship between and Blacks and Filipinos here, and we were trying to find a handle on that. Have you given much more thought on that? Why it was, you know, what's the perception that you had why. . . . Let me back up.

EG: I have . . .

WN: Why do you think Blacks and Filipinos got along?

EG: I don't really know. We may have been somewhat in the same boat to some degree because at that time I don't think there were that many Filipino women here. And there were very few Black women here. So we may have

had some similarities in that category. It's just that I have made friends with different ethnic groups throughout the years that I have been in Hawai'i and it's a cross section of practically all representation of all ethnic groups here. I've found Filipino people to be a very warm-type people. This may have had something to do with it. During the time when I first got here, we were laborers and they were laborers. So we worked together. And they didn't seem to have any hang-ups or anything like this that would prevent friendships being established. This was one of the things. Here we were both working together, doing the same type of work. They evidently had come from the pineapple fields and cane fields, I suppose, of Hawai'i. And we had come in from the Mainland. They with few or no skills and we with few or no skills. So we were sort of tossed together as work teams. And I'm going to be repetitious now, but working together, (had they been) a different type of people, we possibly would not have gotten to be friends. But because they were a warm-type people, no barriers existed. Filipinos may have been the first ethnic group that I got to know along with some Hawaiians. But the Hawaiian people were few and far between. There seemed to be more Filipinos here that I got to know. In those days, anytime that someone invited you into their home it was a special treat. And I think, among some of the first homes that I visited with, were Filipinos. This was the first ethnic group.

But over the years, there (were) the Filipino, the Portuguese—another ethnic group—Puerto Rican. And I'm almost going in order. Not too much Chinese. Later, Japanese from the time I was in Honolulu art school. And then later on *Haole* groups. And a lot of the other ethnic groups in between. But these basic ones, I got to know and have very, very dear friends in all, in each one that I named. Friendships that I treasure. But that's the only rationale that I can give for why Filipinos and Blacks got along together. Neither one of us seemed to have carried a lot of baggage that prevented it. This is basically what it is, I think. Filipinos just don't seem to have that sort of baggage (others) carry. I don't think most Blacks have it. Why? I don't know. But I think it's good that (we) don't.

WN: That's interesting. It seems like a good point that you just made. But also I think a lot of it is the bachelor culture, too.

EG: Yes.

WN: You said earlier, you know, a lot of Filipinos came here as bachelors, and there weren't too many Filipino women. Similar situation to Blacks . . .

EG: Yes. Neither one of us had too many, you know. And even in the Casino Dance Hall, Filipinos seemed to frequent it along with Blacks. Now there weren't too many other ethnic groups that I recall frequented the Casino Dance Halls. But I'm sure that these two groups did. There were taxi-dance halls, I think, where only Filipinos went to. And there were taxi-dance halls, I'm sure, that only *Haoles* went to. And there were taxi-dance halls that others only went to—other ethnic groups. But this one particular one seemed to have been frequented by Blacks and Filipinos. And so I suppose, as you

know, the lack of feminine companionship, wives, and girlfriends and that sort of things, we both lacked. It may have been a common denominator there.

And then on the other hand, it may not. If you stretched the point, it could've have been a reason for us not to have been able to get along because women—feminine companionship—would've been at a premium. And it could've been a good reason for us to have friction. On the other hand, turning the coin over, it could've been a darn good reason because this was the main reason why most of the Blacks and *Haoles* didn't get along. That's always been the case. Because he always thought you wanted his woman. So (the) bottom line was, as far as I'm concerned, (the bases of) most segregation and discrimination is because of women. I think that is the bottom line. If (laughs) they weren't worried about a Black man going with a White woman, I dare say there would have been no discrimination whatsoever. Power, money, none of the rest of it would've meant that much, but when you come down to the women, that was the main thing. But that's my assessment (laughs).

WN: (Laughs) Yeah. Okay. Well, I've asked you so many questions about sociological impact in Hawai'i. Let's get back to just Ernest Golden. In 1946, the war was over. And you left civil service in '46.

EG: Yes.

WN: Why did you do that?

EG: That's a good question. Never thought about it really. I was attending the Honolulu School of Art. And I think, if my memory serves me right, I decided to go to art school full time, meaning I decided to devote my time to attaining an art education. And I think to do that I decided to give up civil service. I was offered a job in the school to help defray my tuition. And that's the only justification I can give for giving up civil service. This is the only thing I could think of. But yet when I did so I was giving up a lot of security because I did not have the security of housing that was available to civil service personnel.

WN: Even after the war ended in '45 you could still live in CHA-3 if you worked?

EG: Yes. If you were still working civil service you could still live at CHA-3. A lot of families were doing that. And I think a lot of them moved out many years later after the war was over. But I was giving up that. For some reason I felt I could give up (the) security. Also, I must have completed my contract. Because without completing a contract, I would not have had the privilege of returning to my home with the government paying the transportation. I have never thought about this. Now that you brought it up. . . . Because first of all I don't recall deciding to stay in Hawai'i until I got married. But even then there may have been thoughts in the back of my mind that this was not my home even then. I didn't come to Hawai'i to stay more than eighteen



months. I came in '43, February of '43. Sometime around July '44 the eighteen months must've been up. I did exercise the option of taking a trip back, then came back and started another eighteen-month contract. This may have been up in '46. And the ticket to return home must have been available for me. I may have had a little savings but I didn't have hardly nothing to speak of. And the job that I was going to only provided me with the bare necessities. But it was to attend art school. And I went more or less for commercial art. And I was looking forward to becoming an art director. I think the art directors' field was pretty open. I didn't pursue it all the way to the end, but that was (the) goal. And that was the reason I gave up civil service.

WN: So here we are in '46. The war is ended. Your contract is over. I would assume that a lot of people that you knew or worked with were going back at this time?

EG: A lot of them must've returned. It must have been a majority because there were only few of us remaining. There were families and married couples that lived on Eighteenth and Nineteenth Street. And there were children that was either brought over as kids—some kids were born here during that period of time to these families. I think after I left civil service I went and rented from one of the families because they had apartments and everything like that. So I don't know how we did it, but somehow or another it was arranged so I could rent. But I was not civil service at the time.

WN: So you continued to live at CHA-3?

EG: For a while, yes. I lived at CHA-3 until December of '49, '48 or '49. I went with Honolulu Rapid Transit, I think, qualified December [1948]. So around December [1948] I still lived at CHA-3. Then I moved from there.

WN: So from the time your contract ended to '49 you were paying to live there. Paying rent.

EG: I was renting not from the navy, but from someone who had a home there.

WN: And prior to that was it free? I don't know if I asked you that.

EG: No, no. (WN laughs.) I think we paid a small amount. I've forgotten what it was. I don't think we paid a heck of a lot. But I think we paid some. I don't think it was free. No, we must've paid something to live there.

WN: Okay. So, you know, you really then didn't have an inkling whether you were going to stay here or not. You were just sort of going with the flow . . .

EG: That's true.

WN: . . . up until you got married.

EG: Yeah, up until the time I got married.

WN: After Honolulu School of Art, you started in '48 at Bader's [*The Display House*]?

EG: Yes. I worked at Bader's display company at the pier that was at the end of Bishop Street.

WN: Bishop ends at Aloha Tower.

EG: At the end of Bishop. There was a pier down there. Pier something. I forgot what the pier was [*Piers 7, 8 or 9*]. Bader's display company was in there. And I worked with them doing displays and that sort of thing because they were doing window displays, until they went out of business. But it couldn't have been too long.

WN: This is window displays?

EG: Yeah, there was some military contracts we set up displays for. Bader's made the displays. We put them together, the artwork and everything like that. And [*Bader's*] was providing window displays for several businesses Downtown and also some of the military bases. I found it interesting work. One I wouldn't have minded staying with because it was creative. And just out of art school I had a good background, a good feel (for) it.

The Honolulu School of Art was quite an experience. One of the best experiences in my life. There have been little pockets of good times that were better than others. That was one of them.

WN: What motivated you to do it?

EG: To go into the art school?

WN: Yeah.

EG: From early childhood I was interested in drawing. And didn't have an opportunity in high school because there was no program for it that I knew of. Didn't know too much about the art field. I always liked drawing. Even prior to going to Honolulu School of Art I had sent for correspondence course and did some portraits for—I was still at CHA-3 in the bachelors quarters—and did portraits of some of the guys around there. And then later I went into the school of art. But the school of art was a totally beautiful experience. Have you heard of Tadashi Sato?

WN: Yeah, mm hmm.

EG: Sato and I were products of that same school. We started out pretty much together. You know, I mentioned I enjoyed some very good friends? He's one of the friends that I had—still whenever we see each other. There was

another guy by the name of Wallace Ige. Ige lived right over here on. . . .  
What's the name of this street?

WN: Ualena?

EG: Is that Ualena? That's not Ualena.

WN: Ualena is over here.

EG: Whatever the street is right here. That loop.

WN: Waiwai Loop.

EG: Waiwai Loop. Ige lived over there. Not too far from where Skylane Inn is. The last I heard he was in Los Angeles, California somewhere. Wallace Ige and I became very, very close friends. I spent a lot of nights in his home with his family over there. The school of art was where I wanted to be after I had finished high school. We had a beautiful group of people. And good cross section of various ethnic groups.

WN: This is part of the [*Honolulu*] Academy of Arts?

EG: Mm hmm. It was [*located*] on the [*Honolulu*] Academy of Arts grounds.

WN: It was on the grounds of the . . .

EG: It was on the grounds. What's that street back of Beretania Street?

WN: Kinau?

EG: Kinau Street. We had our entrance on Kinau Street. Man named Willson Stamper was the director. And he brought modern art into, to my way of thinking, into Hawai'i. I remember one time that school gave an (art) exhibition. I wasn't in that exposition. I didn't present anything. They had all the local artists (represented), and I think most of the (awards) went to Honolulu School of Art students. It was that good. It was fantastic. A totally new breed of cat.

WN: Was tuition reasonable?

EG: I think it was reasonable. But I didn't have to pay anything because I was working my way through. I've forgotten what it was, but I think it was fairly reasonable. A lot of the guys were on the GI bill. And this is how a lot of them (paid their tuition), on the GI bill.

But yeah, I went to Bader's after that, after the Honolulu School of Art.

WN: Yeah. So you left Bader's because Bader's went out of business . . .

EG: Yeah, they went out of business.

WN: . . . while you were there?

EG: Yeah.

WN: And then you went over to HRT [*Honolulu Rapid Transit, Co.*]. What did you do over there?

EG: I was a bus operator. You had to qualify after your training. I qualified in December [1948]. And I drove a bus until, I think, May. But I had too many accidents (WN laughs). I had a major . . .

WN: Really?

EG: Well, I had more than one—chargeable accidents they called them.

WN: Chargeable accidents?

EG: Yeah, you know, where the driver is at fault. This one that I had was a major one. It was (the) second one. It was at Kapi`olani and Kalakaua. And I was coming from Kaimuk. And it was in the afternoon when all the traffic—it must have been around three-thirty. But there was no need. I was young (WN laughs). I rationalize it this way. I had qualified during the Christmas rush. They were rather lax as far as driving (the) bus fast to keep up with the traffic, right? And I never did get out of that habit. So here I was coming from Kaimuki and driving fast when I'm not supposed to. And the policy was that you did not have to speed in order to maintain an on-time schedule because, you know, if you were running late they'd always compensate for it in another way, right?

WN: Right. Hold it. Let me turn the tape over.

WN: Okay.

EG: I was coming from Kaimuki and, I think, going to Pearl Harbor – that run. And there's a little bridge, I supposed, if you recall. It was Kau Kau Korner at that time.

WN: Kau Kau Korner, yeah.

EG: There was a little bridge.

WN: Yeah, it's still there.

EG: Okay, that little incline, that little grade there coming toward town. And there was a little drizzle on the road. And the cops used to hold the traffic, you know, they control traffic at key points. And this particular time---if it had

been a regular traffic light I probably would have timed it and made it. But the police held the traffic coming from Waikiki a little bit longer than normal, and when I got ready to stop at the intersection that bus wouldn't stop because of slippery roads. And I plowed into one of the first cars that was released from Waikiki going toward King Street and knocked down a utility pole and came to rest across the street, across Kalakaua on the *mauka* side. And there was a bus stop over there. I was fortunate though because usually that little island - there was a little island there?

WN: Mm hmm.

EG: And usually a lot of people were there. And I went up on that little island. Fortunately no one was there. Minor Lee was the guy I had hit. Minor Lee was bad. Minor Lee must have been Hawaiian-Chinese or something like that, about five [*feet*] eight [*inches*], and solidly built. I didn't know him personally, but I knew of him. So he said, "You tore my car," and all that sort of stuff.

I just raised my hands, "Okay, I'm wrong, I'm wrong," and that sort of thing.

He decided not to do anything to me. But then the inspector came along (and Minor Lee grabs him by the collar). And the inspector said, "Okay, we'll give you a new car, we'll give you a new car." (Laughs)

WN: Did you know him [*Minor Lee*] before the accident?

EG: Yes, yes. I knew (of) him before that. So when he started walking toward me I said, "I'm wrong. Sorry."

WN: It shows what a small town Honolulu was. You plow into somebody you know.

EG: Yeah. I don't know if he knew me very well, but I knew of him quite well. I knew his reputation.

WN: Did it help lead to your dismissal?

EG: Oh, yes. Oh yes. They said, "We don't want you driving any more HRT buses." So I was unemployed. And this was about the end of May.

WN: By the way, what kind of bus was it? Was it the stick shift or was that. . . . It wasn't a trolley that. . .

EG: No, it wasn't a trolley. It was a shift, it was a manual shift. I should have slowed down. There was no reason for me to be driving as fast as I was. But let's see, how old was I then?

WN: Yeah, you were young.

EG: About twenty-five, twenty-six years old. I lost my job. I was out of work for three months. That's a funny thing. You know, you were asking me about my

physical condition or my classification during the war. I was 1-A throughout the war, A-1, 1-A, whatever it was. And good military material. And I had tried to get employment because you could get employment through the military. I tried for paratroopers. And for some reason, they told me their quota was closed. They had quotas. Quotas for Whites. Quotas for Blacks and that sort of thing. So the quotas (were) closed. I went down to Aloha Tower. This was all during the three-month period of time after I lost my job at HRT [*in 1949*]. I went to work at the airport in September—September 1. So it was during this period of time that I also tried out for the officer's candidate school. They told me to take the exam to see if I'd pass the exam. (I did pass) with, oh, a score of about eighty-five or ninety, somewhere around there. The guy's telling me, "Look. Okay, you passed it, but now you've got to pay your way." And I think he said to Texas in order to go to school there and take the exam. So I gave that up and said the heck with it; I couldn't afford it anyway. So for about three months I was unemployed and this was not a very good time in my life. But somehow or another I made it through. I must've had a little savings but it was pretty much all gone by the end of August. Possibly should have gone back to the Mainland. But I guess by that time I liked Hawai`i. I had made a lot of friends. So at this time I guess I must've been trying to find something to sustain me here. It may have been during this time that I decided to make Hawai`i a home. This was in '49.

WN: Had you met your wife by then?

EG: No. I didn't meet my wife until the following year. It was in May of 1950 that I met my wife. From HRT, Honolulu Rapid Transit, I went to work at the [*Honolulu*] Airport for Brazell's Porter Services. This was a man who'd come out of San Francisco and started the first porter company here.

WN: Hampton. His name was . . .

EG: Hampton Brazell.

WN: Brazell.

EG: B-R-A-Z-E-L-L.

WN: Okay.

EG: And I think Aloha Airlines, it's called TPA, was just getting started about that time.

WN: TPA? What is that?

EG: TPA—Trans-Pacific Airlines which is now Aloha Airlines. [*Trans-Pacific Airlines was founded in 1946.*]

WN: Oh, okay.

- EG: Trans-Pacific Airlines I think they were flying DC-3s. But I think they may have been doing something prior to that. But I think they went into the passenger field because I approached Brazell that time and asked him for a job. Must've been about the end of May or 1st of June. He said, "Well, listen. I'm expecting a new airline to come in. If so, then I'll get in touch with you and give you a job." So TPA came into being, and he did give us a job. September the first, 1949, I started.
- WN: Before we get into some of your porter experience, you were at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. You liked it. It was great experience. Then you went to Bader's display.
- EG: Yes.
- WN: Then they went out of business. Then you went to HRT. Were you looking at the same time for a job relating to what you wanted to do, which was art?
- EG: Good question. I think at that time, no. During this period of time Tadashi Sato, we had all pretty much come out of this school of art about the same time. And Tadashi went to Pratt Institute. And he stayed in Pratt Institute for a period of time. I don't know how much time he spent there, but he came back and he had a studio. He got a studio on Queen Emma Street (and) Beretania. Used to be (a) rooming house there. We called him "Sugar." Sugar had a studio there. He was making it as an artist, doing the things that an artist does and that is, you pay your dues. And Sugar was paying dues in those days. And I think I decided at that time, no, I'm going to get into something that I can make some money. And I think I sort of deviated or detoured from the art field and decided, hey, I'm going to make some money first and then decide (laughs). When I was in the art school, fine arts had not been my primary thing. Fine arts was going to be a sideline. I was making commercial art my major, if you want to call it that, because that's the road you take (for) art director. But Sato was fine arts. He later, as I guess you know and everybody else knows, he made a name for himself in that field. I sometimes I wish I had been willing to suffer the consequences in order to do that. But no. I decided then I wanted to make some money. I didn't want to be hungry.

So the jobs that I was looking for would not have been art-related. I was looking for something that was going to make some money. And I think this is what I found. Not for the long run, in a sense. But for the short haul. The job that I got served that purpose. No, I wasn't looking for that type of thing. The porter service served my purpose quite well because it was immediate money every day. And this is what I wanted. And as I said, portering or skycapping is the term that's used now, is not for generating big income compared to the professional field, but it does give you spending money on a daily basis. Those of us who were skycaps had money every day that we could spend every day and knew that the next day we'd have some more money to spend.

WN: When did Hampton Brazell start the porter . . .

EG: Nineteen forty-seven.

WN: Forty-seven. So right after the war.

EG: He started 1947.

WN: Was there porter services during the war?

EG: No. Hampton Brazell was the pioneer for that sort of thing here. One thing that I've often wanted to do was somehow or another write his history. Get the history of Hampton Brazell (recorded). He was quite a man. He didn't have a high school education. I don't know if he even completed grammar school. But he was the creator of a lot of things. He started porter companies in the state. He was a pioneer of that.

To give you an idea of some of the other things he did, he designed clothes. Back sometime in the late forties, early fifties, we were all wearing aloha shirts that were made from drapery cloth. Now you were too young to know this, but instead of aloha shirts like this they were almost like a bush jacket thing. But they used drapery cloth. It was quite popular. Two things that were popular during the war and right after the war. One was khaki pants. And then later the aloha shirts that were made almost in a bush jacket style—they didn't have a belt in the back—but it was almost like a smock. It was a cross between a smock and a bush jacket made out of drapery material. You know those rattan covers and that sort of stuff. And everybody wore one. Brazell decided he would do something different. He created a regular sports jacket out of it with the lapels and a belt in the back and everything. And we'd modeled those things for the first time, three of us. He made one for him, one for me, and one for another guy, all worked at airport. We modeled them up and down Waik\_k\_. Walked around. Everybody looking at us. "What are these guys?" Dressed to the max. Later, if you might recall, there were some very flowery (coats) came out of Florida—jackets, print-type jackets. You've seen them. You may not remember now. But Brazell had them long before these things came (out).

He had a Chevy. He was buying Chevys in those days. I think it was a '52 or '53 Chevy and put fishtails on it. Made it like a Cadillac. And here was a miniature Cadillac. He redesigned his cars. He did a lot of things. The guy did a lot.

He was considered for a long time the honorary mayor of that section around Two Jacks and Smith Street. Everyone knew him at Waik\_k\_. And we're talking in the fifties. All during the fifties and possibly maybe early sixties, but he was well known, very well known.

He and I became very good friends. He employed me and we became very good friends. He employed me in '49. He finally made me his righthand man.



He didn't have the education. He had the intelligence and the creativity to do a lot of things, but his business needed organizing. He had a small crew of, let me see, four and three. There were seven of us when I started. He had a small crew of seven men, but it was not organized. Just each person did pretty much what he wanted to do when he wanted to do it. We were working about four or five airlines in those days.

And for an example, one of our responsibilities was to take all the cabin bags aboard the aircraft. And this was done after all the passengers checked in. Seemingly there was only one class and that was first class. Not coach and first class they're having now. And it was our responsibility to take those handbags aboard and distribute it among the seats of the passengers because they all had the seat numbers. We would be sitting out front of the terminal and over the PA system they'd be paging for a porter to come, redcap to come or skycap, whatever, for cabin baggage, especially United Airlines. (And) each person (would) be looking at the other. "Well, I did it the other day," and passing the buck and that sort of thing. And I was the most conscientious one and I realized that "Hey, listen. This can't go on." So I'd go and do it. But I would tell a fellow worker, "I'll do it this time, even though I did it yesterday, I'll do it this time providing you do it the next time." The guy (would) agree to anything, as long as (he didn't have to) do it now. "I'll agree to that."

But I'd record this, and I'd record other things. And things that needed a record kept of. So Brazell would turn to me because he knew I kept a record of it. "Golden, what's this?" And I'd tell him. Eventually he decided, "Wait a minute. I'll put you in charge. You be my assistant." To help him out and things like that. And this was the role that I'd play (for) him until such time that he lost it. He lost the business because of taxes. But this was my beginning in the porter service field.

WN: How many people did he employ when you started?

EG: At the time I made the sixth and my buddy followed. There was seven including me. And (we would) rely pretty much on tips for the income because in those days. He was paying us seventy-five dollars a month. Well, seventy-five dollars a month was a far cry from what I had been earning in civil service, but the tips were enough to compensate.

WN: Now how did it work? Did Brazell have contracts with the airlines?

EG: He had a contract with the airlines. He had a contract with Northwest, Pan American, United, TPA, and there was a British airline. I forgot---a British airline and a Philippine airline, I think, were flying in those days. But I don't know what names they were operating under. I think there was a BOAC [*British Overseas Airways Corp.*] or something like that.

WN: BOAC, yeah.

EG: Whether it was BOAC at that time, I'm not sure, Warren. But it was a British carrier. So they contracted him, and he in turn would hire the people to do the work and supervised them. And we worked like the fire department—twenty-four hours on, twenty-four hours off. So it was work I liked. I liked it because we're working with people. It was never, never dull—never boring.

WN: What was a typical day? I mean were you always there? Did you go out of the airport at all?

EG: No, all of the activity was there. The terminal was about the size of one of the terminals, one of the many lobbies that they have at the main terminal now.

WN: Right. Well, this was the old airport . . .

EG: The old airport.

WN: Lagoon Drive, huh?

EG: Yeah. There was a big Quonset hut just as you entered the airport. That was the customs area. And then right next was a [*baggage*] claim area. And then the main terminal. All of the airlines' [*ticket counters*] were on one side—Diamond Head side—of (the) lobby. The lobby was open on both ends, a sort of open-air lobby. Our day would start, oh, let's see, on an average about six or seven o'clock in the morning. And flights were leaving, I think, around nine o'clock or so. Hawai`i was still a territory. Everyone had to go through immigration in order to leave.

WN: You mean just to go to the Mainland?

EG: Yeah. They had an immigration booth in the lobby. And all passengers leaving Hawai`i had to go through an immigration booth. Agriculture inspection. There was an agriculture counter there, a little counter inside the lobby just as you entered the lobby door. There were one or two shops. There was a curio shop. There was a flower shop.

WN: I think there was a restaurant there, right? The Sky . . .

EG: The restaurant. Yeah, the Skylane—no, not Skylane.

WN: It was Sky-something.

EG: It was Skyroom.

WN: Skyroom?

EG: The Skyroom. Yeah. It was connected to the main terminal because after you left the lobby going `Ewa you went through (a section) where most of the airlines had offices and all the other offices. And then you went across the roadway or driveway and went in the next building where the Skyroom was.

Short Snorter Bar was there also.

WN: What was that?

EG: Short Snorter Bar. That was owned by Spencecliff, I think. I think the restaurant was owned by Spencecliff also. The aircraft were on hardstand. When I first went there I think they were flying. . . . DC-4? I know later there came the DC-6. Aloha Airlines or TPA was flying DC-3s. Hawaiian Airlines was on the other side of the field. Pan American, United (was) flying DC-4. Then DC-6. And then later came the Stratocruisers. You know, this was a double-decker. Still, I think, that was a prop driven. The DC-4, the DC-6, and later the DC-8 were all propeller driven. I think that the Stratocruiser may have been a combination. But the Stratocruiser was a big thing for a while there.

WN: Yeah. I've seen pictures of it.

EG: They had a lounge in the lower section of the aircraft. Pan American did. And Pan American was a big airline in those days. So a typical day would start out with us servicing the passengers that were departing around nine o'clock. And later we'd have some arrivals. Our day would end about noon and then another shift would start. Let's say my shift would start today at noon. Any flights that would arrive or depart between now and tomorrow noon my crew would be responsible for. And sometimes we'd have to go until the evening. I think some flights were (arriving) and departing late in the evening. But that was a typical day.

There was a pool system. In other words, whatever team was working together would pool their tips. The honor system had to prevail.

In those days, Hawai`i was beautiful. The aloha spirit existed. People would come to the airport and see the visitors off. They would shower them with leis. In other words, visitors came here then and they got the treatment. They'd go to the hotels. Hotels were just opening up after the war, right? Royal Hawaiian [*Hotel*] had lost its camouflage. They'd repainted it [*back*] to pink. The beach boys were reigning supreme at all the beaches at Waikiki. The people lived at Waikiki in those days. And that's one of the reasons why I felt that the aloha spirit is gone. You see, people could walk to work because they lived right there in Waikiki. And a person would come here and get to know either some of the bellhops or some of the beach boys or some of their families. And when they'd leave they would be decked out with leis and some of the people would even be lucky enough to have a small troupe serenading them, you know, ukuleles and guitars seeing them off. They enjoyed it. It was a beautiful thing. Hawaii was beautiful then. Now, I don't know. They ruined it because they chased the people out of Waikiki. And the people now have to drive one hour (to) one hour and a half in bumper-to-bumper traffic to get (to work) to provide a service. So how can you have any aloha spirit under those conditions?

WN: I know like Moana Hotel had cottages there for employees and things like

that.

EG: Yeah. On the mountain side of Kalakaua Avenue, between Kalakaua Avenue and Ala Wai

Boulevard you had residential.

WN: Right.

EG: And most of those people who lived out in that area worked (in the) hotels and that made it ideal. That's what they should do now. We took pride in what we were doing because we spent some time with the passenger, talking with him. And he would always say he loves Hawai'i so much. And you'd inquire what he loved about it. And he'd say, "Well, the weather and the scenery." And I would always ask him, "What about the people?" Because if the people weren't beautiful the scenery and the weather would be meaningless. You would not remember any of that. And they would have second thoughts. They would have to say, "Yes, the people." Because the people were what made it. The people were what made Hawai'i. And they're about to lose it. They're going to lose it if they're not careful. We'll come up with something else to try to make do, but Hawai'i had three things to offer. They had sunshine which they're going to keep. Scenery, which they can keep most of. They're blocking a lot of it. And the aloha spirit. And the aloha spirit is gone. It's maintained a bit of it now because of the recession. Because of the recession it did not explode. If the recession hadn't come along you would find people not coming to Hawai'i because they say, "No, we don't want to go there." And I've seen it over the years coming about.

But that's another story. It's one of my favorite hang-up stories. One of my pet peeves is how people exploit a commodity. And then they spend all the amount of money in the world trying to (undo) what they have done. They did it in the South with the agrarian economy. And they did it in the North with industrial economy. People just rape whatever they. . . . In other words, get all you can today and the heck with tomorrow. And that's what they tried to do here. Because they had it. You know what they have? They have promotional things on the radio now saying, "Remember the aloha spirit?" and all that sort of stuff. Why do you have to remember it? If you got to remember something it means you no longer have it. And that's what they're doing now. They're up there trying to recapture it. And the only thing they have to do is stop pushing people off the land. They pushed them all out to Makaha and all out to Waimanalo and all out to Waialua. So now they don't have. . . . That's my soap box. (Chuckles)

WN: That's appropriate with all this politics involving the convention center.

EG: Well, it is. I'm glad you agree because this is what they're doing. It's exactly what they're doing. And some years ago, and this must have been the late seventies, the early eighties just before [Ronald] Reagan took over. You see, I've seen this tourist industry grow. I've been a part of it from right after the war until the present day, and I've been in the forefront. We're the gateway—

the airport's a gateway. Like I said, in the fifties it was a beautiful time because the passengers—they weren't the numbers you have now—but the passengers who did come enjoyed what Hawai'i was. But in the early eighties, I have seen at this time that we're speaking of, cab drivers get out and punch passengers, okay? This sort of thing. This confrontation between the passengers and someone who's working in the industry was not unusual. It could be a cab driver. It could be a restaurant waiter. It could be anybody, okay? It could be an airline rep. It could be people who work in my particular field. But the reason for it was that the people had no relief from a constant bombardment of people. There was no getting away from it. It was almost like it was during the war. During the war you had wall-to-wall service personnel. During this period of time that I'm speaking of you had wall-to-wall tourists. And during the war, the people here---it was an emergency, and they made the most of a bad situation. During this time there (is) no need to make the most of a bad situation.

People didn't understand what was happening. You couldn't go to a movie. You couldn't go to a restaurant. You couldn't go anywhere. Churches may have been an exception. You couldn't go to the beach without tourists, okay? So all of a sudden, if you're going to have tourists with you twenty-four hours of the day, somewhere along the way you're going to say, "I want to get away from tourists for a while. I want to get away from a visitor." (If) you have a visitor in your home 365 days of the year. I don't care how close or how good a friend they are, you're going to say, "I wish you'd go home." But they couldn't say that. You see, they couldn't say that to the people so all they become is irritable. People at snack bars were telling tourists off. People at the information booth were saying, "Leave me alone." Airline people, "Give me a break." This is what they were saying. And I told some friends then. I said unless we're careful, this thing is going to blow up because we cannot continue this. You see, I drive on the roads from La'ie to town. A lot of traffic is on the road. Do you know that a lot of that traffic is not local traffic? A lot of that traffic is tourist traffic. And a lot of that traffic holds me up. And I cannot arrive here in a good frame of mind after I've been driving behind some guy who's staring at the ocean (WN laughs) for the past half hour driving at fifteen miles an hour, you see?

[*Ronald*] Reagan came in office and plunged the nation into a depression. And that's when the tourists stopped coming in. That let some of the pressure off. And then (the) people started smiling and saying, "Good morning," and meaning it. Before, you'd meet somebody at the airport and you don't think about saying, "Good morning." You don't think about saying anything, (but) "Get away." It's back again, this feeling of, "Eh, I like you. You're a fine person. There are not too many of you. There are enough of you that I can be pleasant to." Whoever's responsible for this ought to think (this thing) through. (But) they aren't thinking. They're just saying, "Look, there's money out here in this. Get it. Grab it."

And part of the reason for what happened during the period I'm talking about, there was a moratorium on building hotels in Waikiki, based on a

setback. I may not be using the right terminology for this to make my point, but if you had to go so high you had to have a certain amount of setback. And I think everyone rushed to build before this went into effect. Consequently you had an oversaturation of rooms in Waikiki. And what did (they do) to fill these rooms? They started bringing in plane loads of tourists. This is when they started bringing in those big charters from the Mainland. And so instead of shooting for quality they started going for quantity. And the quantity almost blew it up. If the depression hadn't come along this place would have no longer been desirable because tourists would not have wanted what they found. Okay, the second recession came along. This put a cap on everything. You go out to the airport now, you'll find people pleasant to the tourist.

Let prosperity come back. And unless they do something. . . . And the prosperity is coming back eventually. But you're going to find people saying, "I will not go to Hawai'i anymore because the people are rude." And no one will understand why. And the people who are rude are not by nature rude. So there's something causing them to be this way. And you can take the guy who used to be able to walk from somewhere off Kalakaua and walk to the Royal Hawaiian [*Hote*l] or walk to the Moana [*Hote*l], now has to drive from Nanakuli in order to get there, or drive from Waimanalo to get there. And when he gets there he's had to spend a hour to an hour and fifteen minutes or so in order to do this. So he has already worked an hour and a half under pressure before he even punches the clock. So he's not going to be pleasant—he's not going to have the aloha spirit.

WN: Also, too, it works the other way too. Tourists have to learn or have come to demand more things and a certain kind of demeanor from the workers. So a lot of it, too, I think, is caused by tourists who are . . .

EG: Demanding? Far, far and in between. I don't skycap anymore, but every other Thursday I go out there, and I work in customs because I relieve one of my supervisors. We are servicing something on an average of about 6,000 passengers during the period of time that I'm talking about. And of those 6,000, if I run into (one or) two overly demanding, it's unusual. I find that people, in general, are good. The traveling public is good. It's just that they do expect, and rightfully so, they should expect courtesy. Just normal courtesy is to be expected. Rudeness should not be condoned under any circumstances.

END OF INTERVIEW